



# WasteWise Tip Sheet

## Facility Waste Assessments



### What Is a Waste Assessment?

A waste assessment is a systematic way to identify waste reduction opportunities. These actions include preventing waste, purchasing recycled and reduced-waste products, and recycling and composting waste materials. A waste assessment can be as simple as a quick walk-through of your facility or as detailed as a complete review of all purchasing, materials use, and disposal practices. Although the complexity and comprehensiveness of assessments vary, they generally include the following steps:

- Reviewing facility operations and waste generated.
- Identifying potential waste reduction options.
- Assessing the operational and economic feasibility of the most promising options.

### Why Conduct a Waste Assessment?

A waste assessment serves three basic purposes:

- It establishes a better understanding of current purchasing, waste generation, and waste disposal practices.
- It identifies potential waste reduction options for evaluation.
- It establishes a baseline from which to measure the success of the waste reduction program.

Many simple waste reduction actions, such as reducing paper consumption and switching to reusable coffee mugs, can be implemented without a waste assessment. Such an assessment, however, helps to identify those actions that will have the greatest impact and cost savings. It also helps you document these savings, which can be important in getting continued management support for your program.

### How Do Waste Assessments Fit into the WasteWise Program?

EPA encourages WasteWise members to conduct some level of waste assessment to assist in setting goals for waste prevention, recycling, and purchasing or manufacturing recycled products. The complexity of this assessment will depend on the number and type of facilities involved in your waste reduction program, the overall goals of your program, the amount of information you already have on waste-generating practices, and the available resources for conducting an assessment.



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## What Are the Different Types of Waste Assessments?

There are several different types of assessment activities from which you can choose, depending on the scope of your assessment and overall waste reduction program. These include:

- **Reviewing purchasing records** for information such as products that could be purchased with recycled content and the amount spent annually on single-use items that could be replaced with reusable alternatives.
- **Conducting a facility walk-through**, which can reveal important information on operations, such as the extent of current recycling and waste prevention practices.
- **Performing a limited or facility-wide waste sort** to provide detailed information on the individual components of a facility's waste.

Each assessment method has strengths and weaknesses. For a complete discussion of waste assessment approaches, refer to EPA's *Business Guide for Reducing Solid Waste*.

## How Does a Waste Assessment Help in Selecting and Implementing Waste Reduction Actions?

Waste assessments can help you better understand *what types* of waste are generated at a facility, *how* they are generated, and *how much* waste and/or costs can be reduced by implementing specific waste reduction actions. This information can be very valuable in choosing the most feasible and cost-effective actions and in determining what changes in purchasing practices or operations are necessary to successfully implement each action.

## How Do I Get Started?

Once you have narrowed down the options to those you plan to implement, it will be important to involve all affected employees in making the necessary changes. Involving employees in the waste assessment is a first step in getting their support and input on the waste reduction program. Implementation can begin with a pilot program or a company-wide modification to current operating practices. The waste assessment can help you decide on an appropriate pace for implementation. The assessment also serves as a benchmark for gauging waste reduction progress in later years and for identifying new waste reduction opportunities.

EPA has developed a *Business Guide for Reducing Solid Waste* to assist companies in initiating a waste reduction program and conducting a facility assessment. WasteWise hotline staff also are on hand to answer your questions. Call 800 EPAWISE (800 372-9473). In addition, your Regional EPA, state, or local solid waste agency may have additional resources to help you get started.

## What Additional Information on Waste Assessments Is Available From EPA?

To order the following EPA document, call the EPA RCRA/Superfund Hotline at 800 424-9346 or TDD 800 553-7672 for the hearing impaired. For Washington, DC, and outside the United States, call 703 412-9810 or TDD 703 412-3323.

### ***Business Guide for Reducing Solid Waste (EPA530-K-92-004).***

This is a comprehensive how-to guide on assessing your facility's solid waste and choosing cost-effective waste reduction actions.

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## Sources of Additional Information

***The KAB Guide to Waste in the Workplace, 1991.***  
**Free.** A small business' guide for auditing commercial waste, identifying recyclables, minimizing waste and managing disposal costs.

Keep America Beautiful, Inc.  
Mill River Plaza  
9 West Broad Street  
Stamford, CT 06902  
203 323-8987

***Guide to Commercial and Institutional Recycling, January, 1992. \$10.00.*** This guide explains how to establish a waste reduction and recycling program, including conducting a waste audit, employing an eight-step approach to office recycling, and buying recycled products.

Northeast Maryland Waste Disposal Authority  
25 South Charles Street  
Suite 2105  
Baltimore, MD 21201-3330  
410 333-2730



WasteWise is a partnership between EPA and America's leading businesses. Participants set their own waste prevention, recycling, and recycled product purchasing goals. WasteWise supports company efforts through technical assistance and recognition of participants' successes.

We are always looking for good sources of waste reduction information to share with companies. To share your suggestions or for more information about any aspect of WasteWise, call 800 EPAWISE (800 372-9473).

